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TODAY'S FREE SHOWS

Stephen Barry at 11 p.m.

Noon Sonsax (Complexe Desjardins, inside).
Noon Streetnix (Terrasse Grand Marnier).
1 p.m. Bourbon Street (Terrasse Grand Marnier).
2 p.m. La Petite École du Jazz (Complexe Desjardins, inside).
2 p.m. Streetnix (Banque Nationale stage).
2 p.m. Orün. Strolling musicians, departure from the corner of Ste. Catherine and St. Urbain Sts.
3 p.m. Ensemble Multidirectionnel du CEGEP St-Laurent.
3:30 p.m.: La Petite École du Jazz (Complexe Desjardins, inside).
4 p.m. Quatuor à Médée (du Maurier/Radio-Canada stage).
5 p.m. Hot Pepper Dixie (Banque Nationale stage).
6 p.m. Gagnant du grand Prix de jazz General Motors (General Motors stage).
6:15 p.m. Hot Pepper Dixie (Banque Nationale stage).
6:30 p.m. James Cohen (Carrefour General Motors).
7 p.m. Denny's Dixieland Clan (Terrasse Grand Marnier).
7 p.m. Stephen Barry Band (Labatt Bleue stage).
7 p.m. Dialects (Club du Maurier).
7:30 p.m. Canada Raï (Bleue Légère stage).
8 p.m. Vanessa Rodrigues' Soul Project (Banque Nationale stage).
8 p.m. Ronald Baker Quartet (du Maurier/Radio-Canada stage).
9 p.m. Paris Combo (General Motors stage).
9 p.m. Jimmy Johnson (Labatt Bleue stage).
9 p.m. Sonsax (Carrefour General Motors).
10 p.m. Vanessa Rodrigues' Soul Project (Banque Nationale stage).
10 p.m. Ronald Baker Quartet (du Maurier/ Radio-Canada stage).
10 p.m. Dee (Bleue Légère stage).
10 p.m. Dialects (Club du Maurier).
11 p.m. Paris Combo (General Motors stage).
11 p.m. Stephen Barry Band (Labatt Bleue stage).
11 p.m. Thuryn Von Pranke with Adrian Vedady and Martin Auguste (Hôtel Wyndham).
11:30 p.m. Nu Jazz Trio with Dan Thouin, Max Sansalone and Peter Dowse (Savoy).
12:30 a.m. Jimmy Johnson (Spectrum).

VENUES

Du Maurier/Radio-Canada stage, south side Ste. Catherine St., between Jeanne Mance and St. Urbain Sts.
Carrefour General Motors, corner of de Maisonneuve Blvd. and Jeanne Mance St.
Labatt Bleue stage, St. Urbain St. and de Maisonneuve Blvd., north of de Montigny St.
Bleue Légère stage, Bleury St., south of de Maisonneuve Blvd.
Terrasse Grand Marnier, west side of Place des Arts esplanade.
Banque Nationale stage, east side of Place des Arts esplanade.
General Motors stage, corner of Ste. Catherine and Jeanne Mance Sts.
Club du Maurier, south side of Ste. Catherine St., between St. Urbain and Clark Sts.
Hotel Wyndham, enter by Jeanne Mance St., south of Ste. Catherine St.
Savoy, at Metropolis, 59 Ste. Catherine St. E.
Complexe Desjardins stage, inside the complex, enter by Ste. Catherine St.
Spectrum, 318 Ste. Catherine St. W.

BEST BET

Whirling wattage

Canada Raï (7:30 p.m., Bleue Légère stage)
For a complex of very good reasons, a North African concert in Montreal usually contains the energy of a Stanley Cup parade, without the breaking glass. Hard to loot while you're dancing, and Canada Raï will have the place whirling, tapping into the wattage of energy of Algerian pop and the gender dynamic of Cheb Faycal, and his female foil, the sensual Chebba Zohra.

MARK LEPAGE

ESSENTIAL INFO

The Montreal International Jazz Festival concludes today. The complete schedule can be found on the Web site www.montrealjazzfest.com. Tickets can be purchased from Admission at the Web site www.admission.com or (514) 790-1245, and in person at the Spectrum box office, 318 Ste. Catherine St. W. For general festival information call (514) 871-1881.

Sweet sounds

GORDON BECK THE GAZETTE

Brazilian-born Bia performs at the Club Spectrum during the jazz festival yesterday.

In tandem with the big festival downtown, a series of parallel concerts allows jazz performers to bring their music to the neighbourhoods

Dropping in on the Off

IRWIN BLOCK
THE GAZETTE

It's the cocktail hour in the city's hip Plateau Mont Royal district on a sweltering afternoon, and strollers on St. Denis St. can hear the music out on the sidewalk.

We're at the Quai des Brumes, a former tavern with a terrazzo floor at the corner of Mount Royal Ave., and the doors and windows are wide open this Wednesday afternoon as the avant garde jazz group Rodéoscope plays on the bandstand.

The musicians, led by alto sax player Philippe Lauzier, take a country or folk tune and give it an edge, with improvisations from Antoine Berthiaume (guitar), Jean René (viola), Michel F. Côté (drums) and Fred Boudreau (bass).

They are not household names, but thanks to l'Off Festival de Jazz de Montréal, now in its fourth year, the members of this group get a chance they would not necessarily get from the huge Montreal International Jazz Festival downtown.

The music is solid and tough, and it comes to you in the heart of one of the city's neighbourhoods where people are open to it. Inside, some 75 people, many in shorts and sandals, are soaking it up – the beer, the music and the conversation, that is.

Clearly, as this midweek tour of the Off showed, the move this year to diversify its venues rather than concentrate on the city's east end has broadened the reach of this parallel jazz festival.

Our next stop was the venerable Lion d'Or on Ontario St. E., where about 100 fans gathered for an unusual evening show – the madcap, Dadaist musing and music of Rhinoceros Party co-founder, François Gourd, with drummer Pierre Tanguay. The group is called Les Riens du Tout (The Absolute Nothings.)

The evening started with the sound of birds chirping merrily. There were no drums for Tanguay on this set, though. He blew into a metal kettle, played on a toy piano, and produced a cornucopia of sounds from a variety of household objects, noisemakers and toys as Gourd mused about "scraping the bottom of the barrel ... to say nothing."

A woman named Leila, her face painted cat-like, suddenly leaped into the audience, reciting spontaneous poetry in this meeting of parody, theatre and music.

We moved to the 9:30 show at Le Va-et-vient resto-bar in St. Henri, where the music from Vince was straight ahead and West Coast. Alex Grogg is playing Lee Morgan's The Sidewinder on Fender Rhodes keyboard, with Robert Ménard (guitar), Guy Thouin (drums) and Serge Dionne (electric bass). The doors and windows are open and the groove-oriented music pours onto Notre Dame St. W., adding a jazz flavour to the 'hood.

Leader Ménard, introducing one piece, told the crowd, "We are not that many, but we feel good." It said a lot about the Off scene.

At 10:45 we were back at the Lion d'Or for what turned out to be the best show of the night, a jazz-and-poetry session called Générations, featuring Quebec-based and French artists. Denis Badault, who was with France's Orchestre National de Jazz from 1991-94, was at the piano, playing with French bassist Bernard Cochin and Montrealers Jean Vanasse (vibraphone), Alexandre Côté (tenor sax) and Pierre Tanguay (drums).

The tone of the music, moving from subdued to sizzling, fit the spirit of the words and wordplays we heard from Violaine Forest and Patrick Coppens.

The end came 'round about midnight at the lovely Focaccia bar, in the basement, at University St. near the corner of Sherbrooke St.

This is the Off's first venture into the "western" half of the city, and 100 people came by to hear the spirited, two-fisted pianist, Julie Lamontagne, play originals with Richard Irwin (drums) and Dave Watts (bass).

L'Off Festival de Jazz, in scheduling its midnight concerts in this bright and modern room, not only gives musicians like Lamontagne work and exposure, it spreads the jazz message beyond the boisterous and busy big sister festival.

Tonight's show in the Off Festival de Jazz series – a double-header at Le Lion d'Or, 1676 Ontario St. E., near Papineau St. – starts at 8:30, with a career retrospective by vocalist **Karen Young**. At 10:30, the **Normand Guilbeault sextet** pays tribute to the music of Charles Mingus. The package costs $24. Call (514) 570-0722 or see the Web site www.lofffestivaldejazz.com

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NOTES

Visiting journalists enjoy their gig

Praise for choice and punctuality of shows, and the wonderfully friendly helpfulness

Visiting jazz journalist **Tom Gsteiger** is amazed at how "everything starts on time." He's from Switzerland. By comparison, his nation's large Montreux Jazz Festival is somewhat chaotic and has "very little jazz anymore. Here it's big, but it's also good, with a lot of choices."

Meanwhile, **Michael Jackson** – you know, the British ex-pat photographer-journalist (for Jazzwise in London and New City in Chicago) – hailed the festival's "sensitivity for intelligent lighting, which makes my life much easier." Festival officials, he added, are "incredibly generous. Nothing's a problem. There's a sense that you are welcome and regarded as a friend." Anyone who's heard Jackson's tongue-in-cheek witticisms at the midnight chill sessions at Club Soda's bar area knows why he's asked back each year ...

The vivacious **Lee Dunbar** is covering the festival for Reuters. Her day gig is working the rare instrument auctions for Sotheby's in New York. She recently shepherded a $108,000 sale to the Smithsonian Institution of the cornet Louis Armstrong learned on. Without that history, she said, the instrument was worth about $3.50.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

REVIEWS

Wright on her way

Prime candidate for this year's discovery

IRWIN BLOCK
THE GAZETTE

Love will lead the way, sang the lady with the blue roses, and there was something about Lizz Wright that made you believe it.

With a powerful, controlled voice and a penchant for ballads with spiritual overtones, Wright captured the hearts of a packed-to-the-steel-beams crowd at the Club Soda last night.

Wright, 23, did it with a purity of sound, sincerity, clear phrasing and intonation that set her up as a prime candidate for the discovery of the 24th Montreal International Jazz Festival.

Although the cognoscenti have already labeled her an urban soul singer, for the bubbling crowd that left the room obviously charged and uplifted, Wright is the obvious contender.

It was hardly a surprise that after 14 songs, Wright, wearing a light brown gown embroidered with bright blue roses, choose Amazing Grace as her encore.

A Gospel singer born in Hahira, Ga. (pop. 1,626), Wright continued to praise the Lord until the age of 18. It must be said she has not stopped, although her repertoire – most of it last night culled from her excellent debut CD Salt (Verve) – heralds a more universal faith in the L word.

"Gospel to me was black and white, everything else was colours," Wright said.

Her songs included such inspirational tunes as Walk with Me, Lord, Open Your Eyes, You Can Fly and a slow version of Afro Blue, a Cannonball Adderley favourite.

If Wright can be faulted, it is in her staying too close to the core melody in her solo excursions, a cautious approach that will have to broaden for her to gain broader acceptance as a jazz stylist. But Wright's career is just taking off, and judging from her energy and ability to shape and personalize a phrase, this lady is going places.

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Konitz revels in musical lab

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Lee Konitz was spotted walking alone with his thoughts on a deserted Jeanne Mance St. early yesterday, the last day of his four-night invitation series at Monument National. It's been quite a week for the 75-year-old alto legend, and his most-anticipated concert was yet to come: The New Nonet.

"Whenever you say the word nonet," said Konitz, "it's inevitable that people compare it to the Miles Davis group on Birth of the Cool (1948-50). Well, unfortunately Miles isn't around anymore. Besides, this one is very different."

As he was that morning, he began alone on stage, carving out one of the seminal themes, Subconscious-lee, that he played with pioneering modernist Lennie Tristano in the late 1940s. Gradually eight Gen-X dishevelled musicians joined the small white-haired man in the golf shirt and pale khakis – beginning with Matt Wilson (drummer of the year, according to the Jazz Journalist's Association, and a driving force all night).

Suddenly we had the makings of a musical laboratory that looked forward, handling saxophonist Ohad Talmor's intriguing arrangements in an unassuming manner. "As we go on, I'll try to give you information on what's happening in Iraq and things like that," quipped Konitz.

He graced the venerable stage with plaintive solitary lines that had virtually no edges or vibrato, falling away into the night as magically as they arrived.

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